

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Students, business owners, economists and advocates gathered on Capitol Hill today to discuss with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid (NV) how critical Social Security is to the American Latino population.

“As much as we possibly can, we must inform and educate the public about Social Security and what it means to change it,” Rep. Xavier Becerra (CA-31), the CHC Social Security Task Force chair and the only congressional member from California on the House Ways and Means Committee and its Subcommittee on Social Security, said. “Three of every four Latino seniors receiving benefits depend on a Social Security check for more than half of their income. More significantly, for more than one of every two Latina seniors, Social Security represents their only income for retirement. When it comes to protecting Americans, failure is just simply not an option. Social Security works and should not be compromised by risky gambling schemes.”

President Bush’s proposal to privatize part of the Social Security system took up the lion’s share of today’s discussion with folks articulating why they felt the idea could prove both costly and damaging to all Americans, regardless of race, ethnicity or income. However, there was a collective agreement that the group who would be punished most by any privatization plan would be Latinos.

Bob Greenstein, founder and executive director of the nonpartisan Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, one of the nation’s premier policy organizations, discussed the pitfalls of privatization and how it could hurt the pocketbook of both the federal government and future Social Security recipients. “Younger workers are the biggest losers under this approach,” Greenstein said.

Community College of Northern Virginia student Erika Benitez, 22, said, “Latinos are most likely to depend on Social Security as their only income during retirement, or in case of disability. If I want to change this likelihood for myself, I know I must pursue higher education, but even this does not guarantee a higher income. I urge other Americans who are also just starting their careers not to be swayed by promises that cannot be kept.”

Gabriela Lemus, the national director of policy and legislation for the League of United Latin American Citizens, touched on pay equity, a subject that is given too little attention throughout the current Social Security privatization debate. She noted that women, who make \$0.77 to the

dollar of the average white male, would be disproportionately affected by the new system of private accounts for reasons that include longer life spans, fewer years as part of the workforce (because of time spent raising children) and earning less money. Latinas would feel an ever greater aftershock than most women to a dramatically changed system as the average Latina makes \$0.52 for every dollar earned by the average white male. "Simply stated, Social Security keeps Latinas from becoming destitute in their golden years," Lemus said.

Becerra.house.gov